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ABSTRACT

A survey was administered to families in St. Lucia during home visits between November 1993 and July 1995, after the local Parents As Teachers Programme had been affiliated with the Parents As Teachers Program in St. Louis, Missouri (affiliation took place in 1991). In all, 2000 home visits were conducted in the communities of Laborie, Banse, Soufriere, Augier, Vieux-Fort and Choiseul by eight parent educators, six St. Lucian and two American Peace Corps volunteers. Family profiles were gathered which revealed that 78% of mothers and fathers had only primary education; 51% of the mothers were between 20 to 30 years of age; 58% of families had more than 3 other family members living with them; 68% of mothers worked as housewives in their homes; and the overwhelming majority of fathers who were employed were employed in low-status jobs. Four main types of parent concerns emerged from the home visits: abuse (emotional and physical), poverty, irresponsibility of fathers, and enthusiasm for the Parents As Teachers program. Mothers expressed an overwhelming interest in home visitation as part of the program. (JW)

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WHAT MOTHERS HAVE TO SAY

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A home visitor on one of the systematic home visits.

EVALUATION: PARENTS AS TEACHERS PROGRAMME: PART ONE

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This document is based upon home visits lovingly compiled by nine parent educators, seven Saint Lucian and two American Peace Corps volunteers. It is dedicated to them -

Mora Auguste
Shawn Bury
Angela Cenac
Pamela Chiquot
Rosemary Clery
Sandra Daniel
Virginia Edward
Angela Hunte
Tracy Kodek

and to the parents, grandparents and children they visited.

Rosamunde Renard

Brief Background

The Parents as Teachers programme started in Laborie with the very initiation of the Laborie Community Education Centre in October 1982. However, it was not until 1987 that home visits were made to parents. In the first phase, from October 1987 to March 1988, 31 home visits were paid. In phase two, from September 1988 to June 1989, 104 home visits were paid. Then in 1991 the Parents as Teachers programme in Laborie was affiliated to the PAT programme in St. Louis, Missouri for the 0 - 3 years old only. Under study here will be the minutes of home visits compiled between the period November, 1993 and July 1995. In all, approximately 2,000 home visits are being reviewed. They were done in the communities of Laborie, Banse, Soufriere, Augier, Vieux-Fort and Choiseul by eight parent educators.

Family Profiles

A very brief family information form was filled out by each parent educator. 78% of mothers and fathers had only primary education with 17% having secondary education, 2% no education at all and 3% post-secondary education.

51% of the mothers visited were between 20 to 30 years of age. 42% were between 30 to 40 years of age. Only 4% were under 20 years of age while 3% were between 40 to 50 years of age.

42% had less than 3 other family members living with them while 58% had more than 3 other family members living with them. 27% had 5 or more family members living with them.

More than 68% of the mothers worked as housewives at their homes. 14% of the mothers were factory workers and 8% worked in stores. The rest worked in hotels, as pre-school teachers. One worked in a bakery while another worked with the town council.

On the other hand only 5% of the fathers whose jobs were known were unemployed and 12 % were self-employed. None of the fathers held high socio-economic posts in terms of jobs while only a small percentage held middling posts. (1)

Unfortunately, the family information form did not request information about the percentage of live-in fathers as compared to visiting fathers. This deficiency will be rectified.

Themes emerging

From the 2,000 odd home visits with the mothers various themes emerged. The following chart indicates the four most important factors to which parents attached concern.

The following table indicates more precisely all the concerns mentioned.

Theme	No. of times mentioned
1. Enthusiasm for program	41
2. Fathers irresponsibility	39
3. Poverty	30
4. Enthusiasm of children	25
5. Physical punishment	18
6. Emotional abuse	12
7. Parent Educators help	12
8. Drug abuse	11
9. English as a second lang.	7

10. Children's disabilities	3
11. Misconceptions	3
12. Obscene language	3
13. Reading	3
14. Need for counseling	2
15. Parents unwilling to cooperate	2
16. Impact of religious beliefs On children	1
17. Sexual abuse	1
18. Miscellaneous	5

Following are abridged reports from parents and other references about the parents as teachers programme.

1. Parent and Child Enthusiasm about the programme

One mother said that she never knew she had to teach and observe such things at such a young age.

The programme led other parents to send their children to early childhood education centres. A mother noted that she was

willing to send her child to school the following month. Another mother said she was willing to send her child to school because of the programme.

Parents congratulated the programme. Three parents said it should go on for ever. Another praised the programme highly. Another mother kept asking when the parent educator was coming back. Still another exclaimed "I love the programme". One parent educator noted that the parent was excited to see her. In another case, both the parent and child were happy when the parent educator came. A parent promised to praise the PAT programme highly at a monthly meeting. One dropped whatever she was doing when the parent educators came and assisted the educator. One parent educator noted that a parent was happy to see her when she got to her home. A parent asked to be visited twice a month instead of once. Another thought also that once a month was not enough. One mother was sorry that the programme was coming to an end.

For the first time parents considered play as important. A mother noted that she had become aware of the children learnt through play because of the programme. One declared that now she knew the importance of play she would not deny her children the opportunity.

The importance of writing was viewed differently. Whereas before, all parents attached importance to writing at an early age, their attitudes changed as a result of the programme. A parent noted that children would write when they were ready.

Parents noted that the programme helped them to reflect on their lives. One said that the programme was very educational. It made her think back on the past and see what was left out in her life by her parents and what she could fit into it for the future.

Attitudes towards physical punishment underwent a positive change. A mother noted that she had learned to do things differently now. As her child was growing, she saw the meaning of not beating and yelling at her.

Parents felt that the programme could help to counter illiteracy. One expressed the view that had the PAT programme been in existence long ago it would have helped do just that.

Patience was another virtue learnt as a result of the programme. A parent noted that the programme had improved her patience and made her see her children as active and not troublesome.

Enthusiasm for the programme as expressed by the parents was the most important recurring factor emerging from the parent educators' minutes.

The only reason why the children's enthusiasm for the programme did not match their parents was not necessarily because it did not match but that the children were not able to verbally communicate their enthusiasm. In spite of this limitation, many children expressed their excitement over the programme.

One asked "When is the teacher coming" Another asked if she was painting today. A child smiled broadly when he saw the parent educator. One sang a song for the parent educator. A home visitor noted that one child was always excited to see her. Another was very happy with his lesson. An infant shouted "Teacher" when he saw his parent educator and ran to call his mom. A little girl expressed happiness when she saw the parent educator. A boy came close to the parent educator to whisper "I love you". A baby laughed and screamed during her home visit. One child kept asking for her parent educator every day. About 3 children were very shy. Even they opened up however. A parent educator noted that for the first time a child was willing to participate. One mounted leggoes and did not even want to put them away while another wanted to paint over and over again.

A child began to cry when the parent educator left while another eagerly asked the parent educator what she was going to do today. One child grabbed the parent educator's bag. As soon as one boy saw the parent educator he ran to her and said that he was going to school with her. Children were happy to see their parent educators, kept asking for them, showed interest in the programme.

Fathers assuming responsibility

Before the concerns of the mothers are even expressed, it is important to situate Saint Lucian fatherhood and manhood in its historical context. It is not a question of apportioning blame to Saint Lucian fathers for being irresponsible as many mothers do

but, rather, of understanding the historical reasons for their present behavioral patterns.

Historically, the Saint Lucian male was stripped of all responsibility for his women and children. Expressing and holding emotion for them represented in fact an acute danger to the Saint Lucian man physically and psychologically. He could be beaten more than once for leaving his plantation to see his children on another plantation or he could go to another plantation to find them sold. He could be forced to stand up while his wife was beaten naked by an overseer. In light of these circumstances, the Saint Lucian man's feelings for his women and children was forced to go underground. It was only the evangelical missionaries in the pre-emancipation stage and the post-emancipation stage who encouraged the growth of family life essential for peace.

The parents as teachers programme, however, showed that many mothers do not appreciate this seeming present lack of responsibility on the part of the fathers.

The fact that fathers were not maintaining their children was a principal concern. Many mothers noted that fathers were not accepting responsibility and leaving the burden of maintenance on women. Quite a few had different fathers for their children. One mother had three different fathers for her three different children. She asked "Why is it that men cannot accept their responsibilities. They need to be spoken to. Who will talk to them? Will they listen?" A mother noted that her first son's father did not feed him at all. The father, another said, brings something for the child but

not much. Another mother noted that she was the only breadwinner. One father, according to the mother, left her to raise the children. One mother said she had five children without a father. She noted she had always been mother and father. She said she wished she could change the lives of her older children because the absence of a father in their lives had changed them for the worse. Another mother was crying out for the support of her child's father. A mother complained that the fathers did not care about the children. She only received money from one of her several fathers. He gave her $30.00 a month. Two mothers said that the children's father was not feeding them and one of them said when she asked the father for the money because she wanted to send the child to school he cursed her. One mother said that the children's father did not feed the children and the only way she earned a little money was through growing a few plants in her garden. A parent stated she had two children and none of their fathers fed or support them. One father was not feeding the children but gave them $150.00 for Christmas.

Despite all their complaints, only one of the 120 mothers had taken their children's father to the social welfare court.

Poverty

After fathers, poverty was the next concern of the mothers.

Mothers consistently noted that they had problems feeding

their children. One was sick and depressed over financial worry. Another said she did not have a job and could not buy basic things. Two other mothers had to remove her daughter from school because of financial problems. One mother reported that she did not know what food she was going to give her children the next morning

Housing was a problem for mothers. 5 parents were housed in overcrowded, unhygienic conditions. One parent educator found one family all living together in a small house not fit to accommodate so many people. When the parent educator got there all the children were naked and the mother was sharing food on the floor. A parent educator noted that the house was very small to accommodate such a large family and that the child she visited was always roaming around the school compound, naked.

Parents asked the parent educators for full scholarships or reductions in school fees. A parent noted she was not able to pay the school fees and had to take the child from school. Another complained of too many bills to pay to send her child to school. One mother noted she had no money to buy books and that her children went to school with exercise books. One four year old was not able to attend school earlier because of financial problems. A parent was concerned about sending her child to school without food. On at least 20 occasions parents talked to parent educators about reductions in school fees and scholarships.

This poverty led to other problems. A child had a mouth full of rotten teeth. A mother reported that her infirm son's illness was

attacking him and that his medicines cost a lot of money and she did not know where she would get this money from.

Parents said they wanted jobs.

Despite the evident priority given to poverty, only two parents were receiving any help from the social welfare department.

The Draft Poverty Assessment Report - St. Lucia commissioned by the Ministry of Planning in Saint Lucia confirms that poverty is indeed a concern in Saint Lucia. It notes that 18.7% of households could be classified as poor and that 5.3% were indigent. The level of poverty was deeper in the rural districts such as the six communities where the visits were done for the poor were concentrated in the rural districts. Poor families had fewer earners, more children and more persons below working age. They also had higher unemployment and lower labour force participation. This draft report went on to say that many of the services offered by the state to bring relief to the poor were accaparated by the most wealthy - such as school meals for which only 37.3 of the poorest quintile benefitted. According to this report.

> "The economic difficulties of the early 1990s have created a growing group of new poor, exacerbating the problem posed by chronic poverty, often the result of deficiencies in the social and institutional structure that conspire to keep some households trapped in poverty from one generation to another. Poor housing, limited education,

> community disorganisation, absence of or indifferent services can reinforce poverty-stricken conditions such that the new poor if unattended will swell the ranks of the chronic poor." 2

Physical and Emotional abuse

The number of times emotional abuse was cited was just under that of physical abuse and it was felt useful to combine the two. Together, the number of times cited make this concern just as important as poverty. It is noteworthy that often this was not cited by the parent educator as a concern of the parents but simply as a fact of their life which was perceived as negative by the parent educators.

One parent pelt her children with stones. Another noted that when she was a child she was left without food as a form of punishment.

Some parents beat their children severely still, one parent educator noted. One was in the habit of beating her children with wire. A child was beaten because he did not want to go to school. If a two year old picked out the wrong colour on request by the parent educator, a grandmother would hit his hand. A parent recalled that when she was punished her mother would beat her and have her kneel down an hour or two after which she would have to say she was sorry. In one of the six communities, at least one teacher has children kneel for 20 minutes to 30 minutes with their hands outstretched as a form of punishment. Whenever a

mother got upset she would beat the older child. The "man" of one parent beat her up very often. Twice he threw out some of her clothes and asked her to leave, threatening to kill her.

One mother stated her child was troublesome and beat him. Another beat her child every time "something goes wrong with the child". A parent used a belt on her 3 year old. Another parent's boyfriend beat her. Whenever a child cried, one mother beat him. Another mother lashed her children regularly with a stick.

In terms of emotional abuse, parents shouted at their children a lot. Interestingly enough, because of the programme some parents came to regard this shouting as abuse. One said she sees herself as abusive, especially because she criticized her children's mistakes, called them names and beat them.

Parents reported that they had been emotionally abused as children. One felt her parents did not like her, especially her mother. Another also felt she was not loved by her parents and that this was why she did not do well in life. She felt she had failed by having children for different men and by not being able to support and care for her children. One mother's saddest memories are of her parents shouting and beating. As far as another mother was concerned, shouting and beating were her mother's hobby.

One parent felt that her own parents failed her through overprotectiveness and by using the whip too often.

Another mother called her child stupid regularly.

The self-esteem of one parent was low and she feels that was because she was abused as a child. She grew up not liking herself. Even today, she feels she has failed in life. Another parent felt her children's self esteem was low because she criticized them constantly, shouted at them, called them names and never praised them when something was done. She said the programme was helping her to change her behavioral patterns.

One parent said her mother had done her something so bad when she was a child she could never tell it to anybody.

Once again, it is important to situate Saint Lucians attitude towards discipline in its historical context. Presently, according to the Discipline Task force, only 22% of Saint Lucian parents believe that there is anything wrong with physical punishment. (3) Saint Lucia, like the rest of the Caribbean, is the product of a slave society. In these slave societies, the whip was the main form of punishment along with accompanying forms of emotional abuse and torture. According to Gordon Lewis, "force, not persuasion" was the "midwife" of Caribbean history. (4) It is, thus, not incomprehensible that the majority of Saint Lucian mothers feel that shouting, beating and even pelting stones are valid forms of discipline. Discussion through media, home visits, group meetings, community theatre and other activity forms must precede change.

Drug Abuse

While the other concerns were prevalent in all six areas under study here, drug abuse seemed to predominate in Vieux-Fort, Augier and Soufriere. One parent educator felt that a parent was so sick she would soon die. The same parent delivered a baby weighing only 2 pounds. The doctor said that she and her baby would die if she had another. This parent is now pregnant again.

Another child father was a drug addict. Still another father was facing 11/2 year jail sentence for drugs in addition to a fine of $2,500.00 or an extra year. Both mother and father of one child spent most of their time in the rumshop, according to the parent educator while the children stayed at home alone.

Two other mothers were alcoholics. Another father was on drugs. Still, another mother was on drugs. One mother smoked and when she could not get the money to buy cocaine she raged and shouted at her children.

English as a second language

This was the final concern that repeated itself regularly. 7 children out of approximately 240 spoke only creole. 3 parents were reported as illiterate although the number is most likely higher.

Sexual abuse

From the inception of the parents as teachers programme in 1991 to 1995 there has only been one reported case of sexual abuse. In this case the abuse was committed by a stranger although research points to quite the contrary. Most of the cases of abuse are, in fact, committed by family members. In this case, the sexual abuse was also linked to poverty. The other parents do not even hint of sexual abuse although one can be sure that the problem does exist. Perhaps, it could emerge through more direct questioning which will be attempted. The report on the raped victim was as follows:

March 1994

I was asked to visit Miss X in connection with her daughter who was raped in August '93. I visited the home on 3rd December when parent was absent but I did math readiness and shapes with child. On math readiness I did addition between 10 to 20. We first started with bottle stoppers as X's daughter gave some trouble and we ended on paper as seen on attached paper. On Shapes, square, circle and triangle was done with just a few mistakes on triangle. I then read the sly Fox and Little Red Hen to the daughter.

I returned to Miss X on the 4th, 5th and 6th of December. Eventually I met her home before going to work on the 6th and she was sure of being home in the afternoon when I visited her on the topic of the raped child progress at school and the rape incident.

On victim's progress at school the parent said that the home visit was important to the child, the only problem is that the visit is too scarce but one finds the child to be improving at school in spite of the incident although the child misses school at some times.

On victim's health, she has been having a discharge and up to last month she had to take the child for a check up at St. Judes Hospital. She was given seven tablets to take as a dose and another set to take daily and up to now she still passes a little discharge. Miss X said that the child doesn't walk properly since after the incident. On how the incident happened, parent did not want to share with me. She said people are interested to know about people's business but are not interested in helping. All what happened did so because she has no help. She is the only breadwinner of her 7 kids. She is getting pressure from the Primary School teacher for not sending her 12 year old daughter to school, but who will take care of her 27 month son, who she had to get a scholarship for and was rejected and yet there has been children who have got scholarships but if she sends the child to school who will take care of the 27 month child as she leaves home early for work and comes back late. Miss X went as far as saying that people said the children are being hungry and are asking for food. This is why the child is raped. But she cannot fill the children's hunger, as she works for $140.00 a fortnight and by the time she gets this salary she is already owing the grocery shop over $60.00 in debt. The poor children's father doesn't care about them. She has to beg and be going up and down for weeks for a $20.00 or $40.00. This is why her son was unable to go to any pre-school.

The other thing that prevented her from sending the child to pre-school is that she had to be taking the raped child for check ups at St. Judes Hospital and all the time she goes to the hospital she must have monies like $40.00 to $50.00 so where can she get monies for schooling and food. Therefore somebody has to pay so it's she and the kids going to sleep on hungry bellies.

After Miss X had vented out all she had on her mind with sad face, almost ready to cry she said. Miss, the child, was hungry. While on the beach she went to look for a dry coconut and she felt someone blacked her mouth, carried her to the bush and was raped. After the incident she was hospitalized for a few days. I asked parent if the child still has a stigma of what happened. She said at first and also when she went to court and saw the person who raped her, the child was terrified and was not even able to eat and sleep well that night.

Miss, I need help, she said. I want to help the children better but I can't steal for them. I alone know my problems and I will not reveal it to anyone.

Other concerns

The other concerns, appearing relatively few times in the minutes of the parent educators will be dealt with together.

In terms of disabled children. One had an eye problem and one was infirm.

Some parents held certain misconceptions. One felt that playing in the sand gave children worms. The parent educator explained that clean sand did not do so. Another took her sick child to a bush doctor only to have her not cured. The child lost half of her weight. She stopped smiling or laughing and her eyes could not even remain open. She could not even stand well. Through the parent educator's advice, the parent took the child to the doctor and the child was hospitalised for 7 days. While the programme is beginning to encourage more and more local strengths where these have proved reliable, in this case modern medicine was able to accomplish what the bush doctor could not. The alternative does not, however, seem to be a total discounting of all the traditional doctor's strategies. One parent would not let her child play in the sun.

There were 3 cases of parents using obscene language to and around children regularly. The parent educators found one of the fathers quarreling and cursing.

The parent educator in Vieux-Fort reported that 99% of the parents did not read to their children at all. In fact, in all the communities parents did not have a regular habit of reading to their children. One parent reported she hated reading. And yet, research has proven that reading at an early age is a vital factor in the achievement of language development.

The parent educators served as friends, counselors and local psychiatrists. One parent noted she could only express herself freely during the programme. Also, some parents wanted

counselling for older children on sex education. One parent never talked to any of her children about sex. The daughter was ashamed of the discussion on sex held by the parent educator and covered her face while the mother put her head down.

Only 2 parents demonstrated negative reactions or criticized the programme. One parent, the parent educator reported, did not have time to follow up and was always playing basket ball. Another parent said that more attention should be spent on the child during home visits and discussions with the parents should be left for group meetings.

On one occasion, a parent educator felt that a parent's religious beliefs were so extreme that they prevented the development of good self esteem in her children.

Again, on one occasion, a parent educator expressed concern that the TV was distracting one of the children from participating in the programme.

There was a four year old boy who excreted and urinated all over the house.

The boyfriend of one parent went to jail for stealing.

Sum-up

Mothers expressed an overwhelming interst in the home visitation part of the Parents as Teachers programme. This

programme was able to reveal their priority concerns. While reinforcing local strengths, the programme was able to institute change against negative traditional patterns such as child beating as a main form of discipline. To what extent, however, change and empowerment were realised remain to be seen in the second part of the evaluation.

Footnotes

1. Among the fathers 7 were salesmen, 7 were self-employed, 3 worked in hotels, 3 as masons and 3 were unemployed. There were 2 fathers each who worked in the brewery, as carpenters, as farmers, as teachers, as government workers, as factory workers and as dockworkers.

2. Draft Poverty Assessment Report - Saint Lucia, May 1995, Volume 2 of 3, pp.111-113

3. National Survey on Discipline: Final Report (Saint Lucia, Ministry of Education, 1994) p.15

4. Gordon Lewis, Main Currents of Caribbean Thought (Kingston: Port of Spain, Heinemann, 1983) p.6